

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: MILDRED (UMPA) MCKINNIS**

**INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER**

**DATE: APRIL 24, 1989**

**M = MILDRED**

**Y = YILDEREY**

**SG-LA-T548**

Interview begins with informant speaking:

M: In about ten years he purchased a piece of property on Chestnut Street, which is now directly across from the North Common, you know, between Elm Street and Short Street. Well our house is right across the street from there now. And uh, that is our house used to be, it's still there.

Y: Okay. Uh, let me make a little announcement. Today is April 24, 1989, and uh, I am with Mrs. Mildred McKinnis. M C K I N N I S. Um, this is 52 East Street, Lawrence or Methuen?

M: Methuen.

Y: Methuen. Okay. The first picture um, uh, we saw was of her father and his name was uh?

M: Ignatius Benedict Umpa. What a name! So different you know.

Y: Mc, McLacius?

M: No, Ignatius.

Y: Ignacious?

M: I G N A T I U S

Y: Benedict?

M: Benedict Umpa.

Y: Umpa, or Umpa.

M: Umpa. We pronounce it Umpa.

Y: Umpa. And uh, the year, estimated year would be um?

M: Of that, would be about um, ummm.

Y: How old does she look like?

M: Probably about uh, 19 uh, 1925. About 1925, because I, I was still at home.

Y: So after working in the mills he quit entirely?

M: Uh, oh he worked in the mills for quite a long time. He worked till he was sixty-five. And then he retired because we were on the farm and there was always plenty of work to be done. And he was, he was the, of course the Lithuanians were, well they enjoyed working the land, you know. So he, I guess his heart was in having a farm. So he finally, after living in Lawrence for about ten years after he purchased a three decker home, and then he had two cottages. He had one cottage moved over from across the street into our yard, because we had a big yard. And um, oh we had chickens and everything in the city. We had to have permission to have them you know.

Y: In the city?

M: In the city, right there we had chickens.

Y: Is there any pictures of that? (M: Uh, well I do have) I mean later we can uh, (--)

M: I do have chickens. I don't know [unclear] .

Y: [Clears throat] I have um, I have the tape. I talked to you before. And uh, he worked in what mill?

M: Well he worked in the Arlington Mill first. He was a loom fixer. And then he worked in the [Woolen] Mills (Y: as loom fixer) as a loom fixer too. And uh, then at sixty-five he retired. And um, he you know, just worked around town.

Y: If you would ask me what is the date of birth of my father, I cannot tell you, but do you know your father's?

M: My father's birth [unclear]. (Y: More or less) My brother John would know more because he was at home a long time. See he never married. (Y: Right) And so he used to talk with my mother a lot. So he has a lot of history that's (--)

Y: Yeah, when did she die? (M: Uh) Maybe from there we can uh, (--) Is this taken um, while he was working in the farm?

M: Yeah, he was working. No, no, he (--) Oh yeah. This was on the farm yeah. That was taken on the farm.

Y: This is number two picture, and that is the farm (M: yeah, then the) which your father bought?

M: That's right, and there's my father.

Y: It was, it was where?

M: Uh, in Methuen. In fact they are excavating the property now. It's uh, I think they're going to build condominiums there, or something. The eighteen acres of land we had, see that's my father, that's me.

Y: From the left first. [Clears throat] First from the left is um, uh, mother and father.

M: Mother and father, then myself.

Y: The second one is Mildred.

M: Then my mother. And I think that's my brother John. And that's my brother Peter.

Y: So almost the whole family is there.

M: Yeah. Well one more brother. He was probably uh, in school at that time.

Y: What year would you estimate? How old were you there?

M: Um, oh let's see. [Y: clears throat] Well maybe eighteen or so.

Y: Eighteen?

M: I think so.

Y: 1918?

M: Well no, not 1918. I was eighteen years old.

Y: Oh, you were eighteen years old.

M: I think. I think I was about eight... Well no, I'm not quite sure. I think I was probably in high school, maybe sixteen.

Y: Uh huh. So um, she was sixteen years old. And your birth was 19 uh ?

M: 1907.

Y: 07. Um, so it should be then 1923, 1924, in that area.

M: Yeah see, I would have been in high school at that time. Yup.

Y: And you had eighteen acres of land you say?

M: Eighteen Acres.

Y: And you all worked on the farm?

M: Well um, (--)

Y: I mean a little help here and there.

M: I don't know whether just looking at these pictures would give you an idea as to what we were doing? See, now here's, here's the apple orchard. We're picking apples. And here we are sorting apples. And my father used to take the apples that were broken up to the cider mill, and we'd have cider. And my father would sell cider by the gallons. You know we had people in the country that loved the cider.

Y: I really like this picture. That is number 3. One can see the apples. And who are?

M: That's me.

Y: From left the first one is you, and that's your mother.

M: And that's my mother.

Y: And you were how old would you estimate here? I want to put a date more or less you know?

M: Uh...

Y: You look like uh, eight, nine.

M: Oh no, no, no, I was older than that. Oh I was a lot older than that. I was may, maybe high school age.

Y: Really!

M: Yeah, yeah. I think so.

Y: Oh.

M: I'm kneeling down there you know, I'm kneeling. I'm not [unclear].

Y: So again, sixteen, eighteen range.

M: Yeah, about that.

Y: And your father used to make apple cider?

M: Apple cider.

Y: You told me that one could get drunk over that.

M: Oh absolutely! (Y: laughs) I have to tell you about something. I don't know, is this going on?

Y: Shall I stop it?

M: No, I was just going to say, a friend of my father's used to come to visit him. Well this particular time he came, they sat in the kitchen. My father would go down and get uh, half a gallon, a big pitcher of uh, his cider and he'd have it in the barrel downstairs, you know. In fact, my brother Johnny used to enjoy a glass every time they ate, you know. That would, the Italians had wine, we have the cider. So this friend of my father's came and they sat at the table you know, talking about old times and what not. Well he walked all the way from Lawrence to where we lived, you know? And people didn't have cars in those days, you know? So he walked. And when he got up to go home, he had to stagger. He staggered all the way home. He said you know, he just had no idea of the potency of that uh, uh, um, cider.

Y: I didn't know that one could get drunk from apple cider. Is it a special?

M: Well that's not, it's not sweet, it's you know, fermented, you know.

Y: And uh, that one is uh, picking up the apples?

M: Apples. Yeah, all picking apples.

Y: Is uh, are these the family members?

M: Um...

Y: Can you see? I cannot see. That's number 4 picture.

M: That's John.

Y: The left from the first row.

M: The left is John, then my, then my father.

Y: The second is father. It doesn't matter if you don't (--)

M: I'm trying to make out who is (--)

Y: The third one is your brother?

M: Yeah, yeah. The third one is my brother. Oh, there's someone at the top here. Oh, I didn't notice that. There's one up there. That's probably Peter, and then down below here might be (--) Well I don't know about Charlie. Charlie was probably in Boston at that time. He was going to school.

Y: So um, that was um, number four.

M: Or grated, you know. But he sold them, he sold them by the barrels and the bushels. They used to have a, well we had a horse. See we have a horse. And that's my dad. Uh, I didn't know (--) In fact, I think it would be a good idea to look at some of these pictures first. And uh, (--)

Y: Number five is Mildred's father. And uh, that is um (--)

M: Well we'll call that a temp thether. (Y: What do you call?) Thether. (Y: How do you spell it?) T, I think it's T H E T H E R, thether.

Y: T H E T.

M: T E T H

Y: T H E T.

M: No, not T H. T E.

Y: Oh I see. T E ...

M: T E H (Y: H) E R (Y: E R ) Then they'd have to scatter it again and they turned it over so the sun would get at it, you know?

Y: So again, the problem, you didn't find the year. Who knows, huh? 1920's?

M: Yeah, that would be in the 1920's. The chickens are in Lawrence. Then when we were in the country we had you know, chickens too.

Y: But how can you take that? I mean that is (--)

M: Well I can take it out if you want it.

Y: Yeah, I would like to have that.

M: Yeah, okay.

Y: But don't, please don't if you cannot. Just, I don't want that (--)

M: [Unclear] the old books.

Y: So this picture is number six. And can you tell me a little about that? Who is the person?

M: Oh this is my brother Peter. They're getting the hay up on the wagon.

Y: And why did you have hay, so much hay? Did you have cows and (--)

M: Well we had cows. Yes, see, here's the cows.

Y: How many, three, four, five?

M: Uh, well we used to have four. (Y: Four?) And then we had the horse.

Y: Yeah. So this picture is more or less taken in 1927 I see here. (M: Yeah) So number 6 was taken 1927. That was in farm. And uh, #6. Number 7 is where um, this is you?

M: Uh, no, that's not me. 1927 I was graduate, I graduated from high school in 1925. So this is like (--)

Y: Who is this cute little one?

M: That must have been a little relative of ours that was spending time.

Y: And this one?

M: That's John. (Y: John?) Yeah, and that's my mother.

Y: So that is um, number 7. And again that is probably 1927.

M: Now do you want this?

Y: No, that's fine. What (--) I'm interested in that picture, but uh, (--)

M: Well I'll let you have it. Maybe, I think God steered me to get these things together so they'd be of some use to somebody, you know?

Y: That's a beautiful picture. Put that aside. Uh, I hate destroying your pictures. (M: Well) So um, that picture has number 8 with the car. And that was the first car [unclear].

M: Yeah, that's our first car.

Y: And uh, that was 19 (M: '27) 27. What kind of car was that?

M: That was a Buick.

Y: Buick? And who are these people? From the left first.

M: Now that's, that's Peter, John, Mildred, Pa, Ma, and Charlie, he was the doctor.

Y: And who took the picture I wonder?

M: Um, I don't know who took the picture.

Y: How much did the car cost? Do you remember? I mean that's a question, yeah.

M: I wish, my brother might be able to tell. Not my brother John, but my brother Pete would be able to tell.

Y: It's a beautiful car. It's like you know, I wish you would have today. It looks uh, (--)

M: Yeah, it's old. It was a hack, you know? Considering, you know, the way the cars are made now, that was a real, like a truck, you know. It was so heavy.

Y: Did this change the way of life? I mean after having the car you could move easily here and there.

M: Well we were (--) Well I'll tell you, you know, [unclear] I wish I had a picture. Before the car we had a buggy.

Y: Buggy is the um, (--)

M: You know the cars were just coming in at that time. They were just beginning to, well our, not too many of our people have, but if, if some of the people that had a bakery you know, or whatever, they'd probably have cars. But we didn't have a car till say 1927. But before we had the car, see I'd like to tell you about um, huh, living out on the



farm and having cows, we had cream and we had cheese. My mother made the cheese, you know. And we had cream. And we sold milk in the big cans, you know, to the, the, to the milkman. And my mother and father, or one of, usually my father and my brother Pete might uh, take, take the horse and buggy and deliver to the stores on Park Street. There was a Lithuanian store there. And so they would buy the cheese, and they would buy the cream. And my mother made the cheese, you know, how they put it in these cloth bags, and they put stones on them to get the uh, the water out. So they sold the cheese and they sold the cream. And my father also sold the apples. And he sold them by the barrel, and he sold them by the bushel. And they had to you know, truck it up to the third floor, or wherever, and in the basement if they lived downstairs. But that was the way uh, my brother went to college. You know, I mean he (--) (Y: Which one? Uh, [unclear]) Yeah, Charlie went to college (Y: Charlie) and then Peter went. He went to business school, Bryant Stratton in Boston.

Y: John did not go to school?

M: No, he didn't want to go to school, He was um,

Y: Interested in music.

M: He was sort of, he was sort of slow in the beginning. Of course he was the first one. I guess he was very very sick when he was a baby my mother said. And uh, so he stayed home. And then he, he worked in the mill. And my father had uh, uh, had uh, Charlie and John take music lessons. Charlie played the violin, and John played the piano. And my father, my father used to (--) Well this is going back now when he was in Lithuania. He had three horses. And he had, he was a cabby driving. He took the people to the beer gardens, you know to listen to the music and what not. So (--)

Y: How do you call cabby driver?

M: Cab driver, yeah.

Y: Cab driver, yeah, but by horses.

M: Horses, yeah. (Y: Yeah) And so he would take the people in the area to the beer garden, or, or maybe the opera, I don't know. But see, I didn't, when you're a kid you don't talk too much about this when you're at home. And my brother Johnny you know, was at home. So you know he would uh, while he's working in the field with him, or whatever, he (--)

Y: Yeah, but last time when I was here he did not say much.

M: Well he's eighty-seven, you know, and he's got a good memory if you'll ask him, you know. He's got a, he's got a better memory than I have.

Y: But uh, you are so articulate and so expressive. I mean (--)

M: Well I don't know as I'm so articulate.

Y: Well that must be one of the first cars?

M: Oh and that's, on that, well it could (--)

Y: Well if not the first one.

M: Well it was our first one [rest of comment unclear].

Y: Yeah. I mean in the area in those days people did not [unclear].

M: Yeah, in that area, probably, yeah. And before that I started to say cars were just beginning to come in and we bought a, oh what do you call, like a hack, but for four people, you know.

Y: Buggy you said?

M: Well it's, it was covered, it had the lights, you know. I mean two big lights. In fact I think grandpa got rid of them. They were in the basement. And I was going to put it in our front door. When I went looking for it, it wasn't there anymore. And so it was gone. So I said Grandpa must have gotten rid of it. That was Pete's father lived with us for fifteen years here. And so um, we got this hack. And oh, I was so, I think I, I think I had just started working in Boston at the time. Or was I? No, I don't think so, because 1927, well just about, about that time when we got that hack we went, we drove to church with it. And of course we lived um, about four miles from our church, because we lived in Methuen in front of the Merrimack Valley Country Club, if you know where that is. Well we lived in that area. And so we (--)

Y: Which church is your church?

M: Uh, Saint Francis Church, but at that time they were building a new church, and we were going, using the Portuguese church on Chestnut Street where we used to live. And gosh, you know, when we drove over in that buggy, I was so embarrassed, because they were going out and cars were coming in you know. And I'm, I think I was working in Boston at that time. You know, little bit bigger ideas, you know, and a little more sophisticated. And uh, in fact my brother Johnny said, "gee, do you remember when we used to drive to church with that hack? [Laughs] Finally if wound up on the farm and the pigs were in it, you know. We had it in their area, so they used it for shelter, you know? So that that was the story of the hack.

Y: And I was wondering how, or if the car changed the things around so you could go easily to the beaches. Did you go to the beach?

M: Well yes, Wells.

Y: In those days what one can do?

M: Well in those days there wasn't anybody that, we really didn't have time. We were too busy. We had gardens you know, and we were weeding the potatoes beds and getting the bugs of the plants. And uh, chickens. And then later on we had, well my brother was in the grain businesses. And uh, he's got a beautiful home in Andover. And uh, so we were very busy. You know, even, even ourselves, this present day, I was just talking to my brother, you know, we have the money and we don't know what to do with it. But I'm, I know what I'm doing with it. I have given the Nevin's Memorial. I've given to the Bon Secour. I've given to the Lawrence General Hospital. I've given to the Garden Club. I've given to my Civic Club. I gave them all \$1,000.00 a piece.

Y: Well keep something for yourself.

M: Oh I, there's, there's enough for me and I'm, I'm just not spending it the way I (--)

Y: So from the left again this is uh, (--)

M: Um, do you want me to write it down?

Y: No.

M: This is Peter.

Y: Peter is the first and then (--)

M: And then John.

Y: Peter, John and (M: Mildred) you, your father and mother.

M: And Dad, my mother and Charles.

Y: And Charles. Charles. (M: Charlie) That's a great picture. And what about here? Who's uh?

M: Oh, this is me.

Y: Where, what beach is this?

M: Uh, this is Salisbury.

Y: Salisbury. And who are these people?

M: Oh this is me, and the same friend. She was my bridesmaids. My brother Charlie and my brother Peter. And this is Charlie.

Y: Will it be uh, would you be embarrassed if I take this here?

M: No! You can have that.

Y: I want to show how people, you know, um, bathing suits change drastically since uh, (--)

M: And how!

Y: Do you want to use that?

M: [Comment unclear]

Y: This is uh, number 8. Number 8. And uh, again, the year is 1927. (M: Yeah) And that is at the beach of?

M: That's Salisbury beach.

Y: Salisbury. I guess everyone went to Salisbury beach in those days.

M: Yeah, in those days, yeah.

Y: How did you get there?

M: Um, oh I guess we got there by car, because we had a car by that time. See, we had the Buick by that time.

Y: So from the left the first one is? (M: Peter) Peter.

M: And that's, was my bridesmaid. She was, she's from Connecticut.

Y: That's his girlfriend?

M: No, no. No. She's just a close friend of mine, of the family's. And my brother Charlie, (Y: Charlie and uh) and myself. (Y: Mildred)

Y: That's very interesting.

M: There's Mildred acting like a nut. We had the well here. This is where, where we used to put our watermelons. When we bought a big watermelon we didn't, well we had the icebox, you know, at that time. But that watermelon wouldn't fit in there, so we got it in the uh, and here's our horse. And this is our uh, be together a lot in the house, you know. (Y: Johnny?) Yeah, Johnny. And we'd be, you know, washing the dishes, or whatever. And we'd always have the milk pails. You know, the big, what my father

used to(--) I tried milking the cow too, but the cow looked at me and I ran. And uh, so uh, what did I start to say.

Y: I said maybe it was a little escape from farm to Boston. You said uh, (M: No, no.) no it was not.

M: No, that, that wasn't it at all. After I get, oh I started to tell you about washing to the milk cans. So we had this milk can that had to be washed every single day, because at five o'clock my father milked the cows. And then of course there was the big milk cans too that the milkman came to pick up. And um, we'd be working at the sink and my brother Johnny would say um, oh oh, before my brother John said this, I'd have to say that I used to say to myself, "who the hell is ever going to find me here on the farm", you know? I used to think that, "who's going to find me out here?" I used to go walking you know, up the street. And we, we had friends, and so we'd go walking up Hampson Street. I don't know whether you know where Hampson Street is. We'd walk as far as Salem. We'd go to Quimby's for ice cream. And you know, uh (--)

Y: You mean to find someone?

M: Well you know, just to be out to do, maybe you'll find somebody. You know, because where did you go? You didn't go anywhere?

Y: You were so isolated.

M: Yeah, Yeah. So you know, I said, "who's going to find me out here?" And um, (--)

Y: You know, I had a friend, she lived also in a farm. And she said the same thing.

M: Yeah, you know, you feel "gee you know, here I am, and who's going to care. Who's going to find me, you know?" So you'd go walking, you know? Of course we used to have this Maple Park up the street not too far from us too. We used to go to Maple Park and they'd have dancing and whatever. And uh, so that, that was you know (--). Oh there's my brother Charlie.

Y: This is a picture I don't want to use maybe here. Where did you say you used to go?

M: Uh, dancing?

Y: Dancing and other places.

M: Well, Canobie Lake was one.

Y: Where is Canobie Lake? Is in New Hampshire?

M: Um, it's in New Hampshire? Yeah. Canobie Lake. Um, Roseland. Um, (--)

Y: Also in New Hampshire, Roseland?

M: Um, no, that was in Methuen. And uh, there was Merrimack Park.

Y: Merrimack Park is uh (--)

M: That's also in Methuen.

Y: Uh huh, to picnic?

M: Uh, no, no. That was just for dancing.

Y: Dancing. (M: Yes) Oh, these places are for dancing?

M: All just for dancing. Yeah.

Y: I thought the first one, Canobie Lake is uh, a kind of beach.

M: Well that's uh, they don't really permit too much picnicking there. They want you to buy my food. They don't let you uh (--)

Y: But one can swim there?

M: No. No. No, you can't swim there. And uh, another one was [name unclear] Park. That was in Boston. Starlight Kimbal was in Lynnfield. And um, let's see, what other areas. We had many, many places to um (--)

Y: And therefore swimming, most of the people went to Salisbury.

M: Well to Salisbury, or we had a few ponds. There was Welsh's Pond they used to go to. In fact our church had the (--)

Y: I like this picture. May uh, can we take that? I like uh, how it uh (--)

M: I don't know how I can get that.

Y: This is number 9 picture. And uh, there are five beautiful girls. From left the first one is Sadie?

M: Sadie, Kate, well they used to call me Mil, or Millie, Mildred, uh, May and Dee. They used to call her Dee, so [unclear].

Y: And that is uh, what year? Is it the year '30? (M: Oh, '30) So 1930 uh, this is (--) Which one is you, this one?

M: Yeah, I'm in the middle.

Y: In the middle. So Mildred uh, after graduating from high school, went to Boston to (-  
-) Why don't you tell your story instead of me? [laughs].

M: Well.

Y: When uh, when uh, after graduating high school means the year of 19... (M: That was 1925) 25. (M: 1925) Well how did you find your job, and how did you manage?

M: I went looking.

Y: Yeah, I mean how old?

M: Yeah, well you went to a different um, agencies. You know, they had employment agencies at that time. I don't think they have anything like that now. Maybe they have them but they're, you know, they're concentrated. They're not all over the place. They had quite a few.

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS

M: In fact a friend of mine, and I would, we both went together. We both graduated the same time. And uh, we went into this perfumers office. Ben Levy Company was the, they're Parisian perfumers. And she went. I said, oh will you go in. She had more courage language. So she went in, and we even walked the stairs. We didn't go by the elevator, because the elevator opened up right into their office. So we didn't want them to know that we were together. So this young lady went in first. She, she was a little more of a go-getter than I was. And she came out, and she didn't get it. So. I said "well gee, if you didn't get it, I won't either", but then I went in and I got the job.

Y: What was the name of the company again?

M: Ben Levy Company.

Y: Ben Levy?

M: Levy, L E V Y. And our boss really lived in Paris and he used to come only once a year, but we had, he had you know, (--)

Y: Yeah, and what, what did you say they produced?

M: Uh, well perfumes, [Y: Perfume] and uh, face powder.

Y: And your job was in the office?

M: In the office, yeah. I did uh, well I didn't do any book keeping. Most, mostly my work was secretarial, stenographic.

Y: How long did you work?

M: Taking dictation. I was there ten years. (Y: Ten years?) Ten years.

Y: Same company? (M: Yeah) And uh, I can imagine in 1930 must have been something very unusual for a young girl who moves out to Boston.

M: Probably it was. I don't know, I just had courage I think. And you know, you know, I think I have a Guardian Angel. I really do! I have a Guardian Angel that takes care of me. One incident that I just had happened, and this really proves it. One Saturday I came home from Church and I got into a comfortable robe, and I'm ready to have supper with John. My grandson calls and he says, "Nana could you come down to the skating rink at the Methuen school there, and bring me five dollars." She said, "I called Ma and she isn't home, they went out to eat." So they had come in from Lynnfield, they had been playing hockey on a team. So I said, "well hold your horses. I'll be down as soon as I can get ready." So I had this [Nutrea?] coat that was, it was really a warm coat and not heavy, but it was a warm coat. And just you know, finger tip length. I put that on, and I was (--) In order to get to my car I had to go down three, three steps and close the door backward, and then there's a plateau. Then I have to get two steps to get into the garage. And between the garage and this door there's a cellar stairway, eight steps down to the cellar. I'm turning around backward, and I don't know what happened, but my foot got on the step to the basement, instead of turning around on the plateau, you know? I fell down eight steps on my back. I slid down like a shoot. I slid down! And when I got down there my feet were up you know, like a pretzel, you know? And I thought, "oh God will I be able to get up now?" Nothing seemed to hurt. So I extricated myself from my position. I got up and I said, "now can I get up the stairs?" I got up the stairs and I said, "now can I drive the car?" So got into the car and I sat down, delivered the five dollars. And I said to Ann, "honey you don't know what this trip cost me." I said, "I fell into the stairs." He doesn't remember, you know, he was here just a couple of days ago with my(--)

Y: Now when, when did it happened?

M: This was last uh, oh, about uh, um, (--) (Y: couple of years ago?) No, no, no, no. This was just um, let's see, what is (Y: April we are now) uh, it was about September. (Y: Last year?) September, maybe October, yeah. (Y: 1988) Yeah, because it was cold, you know, (Y: Yeah) that I had this coat on. (Y: Umhm) Thank God for that coat. And I only had, when I looked I only had a little black and blue mark, but nothing, nothing really happened.

Y: Why, why did you mention it? We were talking about the um, 1930 um, uh, office. There was a connection. Oh, because she did not get the job, and you got the job.



M: Oh yeah, I got the job. (Y: Yeah) So I worked there for ten years. (Y: Yeah, did you?) And then the depression hit, you know?

Y: Well 1930 was exactly the year.

M: Yeah. See the depression hit and I lost the job. Then I went to work for an electric company. The Columbus Electric Company, or something.

Y: In Boston.

M: In Boston again.

Y: Did you like your job in the office what you did? Or did you like people?

M: It was a snap. [chuckles] I'll tell you what, you know, when the mice, when the boss is away the mice will play. I mean the cats will play. And we had a boss that liked to play cards. So he would leave at 11:00, just before lunch time. And he would go to the Essex Hotel and he would meet his cronies there, you know, and they would play cards. And he wouldn't come back till about 3:30 or 4:00. So he gave me all the dictation early in the morning so that I got it all set up. When he came back he would sign the letters. And uh, of course I commuted. Is this being taped? (Y: Yeah) Oh jeeze!

Y: Should I [unclear]? Is there anything special?

M: Well it's not anything special, but like I say, when the cats away the mice will play. So I used to commute from the farm you know, I'm commuting.

Y: How, your own car?

M: I took a bus. No, no, no, no. We didn't have a car to (--) I didn't have a car. I had to walk from my house. I had about a five minute walk to my bus. From the bus I walked across, well for awhile I worked, I went to the old station. That was by the old Post Office. From Essex street I'd walk there. But then when they gave up the uh, uh, the railroad station there, I had to walk across the bridge to get to the train.

Y: Which bridge is this at?

M: The Central Bridge. (Y: Central Bridge) The Central Bridge. I walked, I think it's off Amesbury Street. I walked across the Central Bridge. I took the train. I took the ten minutes past eight train, and I got into Boston, and I got into work just before nine o'clock. And it really you know, didn't matter if I was a little late or not. And after I got off the train I had a half hours walk to my office. I worked right in the, well not too far from the South Station. So I walked from the North Station to practically, well it was on Kensington Street.

Y: When did you get started?

M: When did I get (--)

Y: I mean working in the office. When you left eight, ten minutes after eight, you were (--)

M: Well I was in the office about 9:00. (Y: 9:00?) Yeah. About 9:00. I think it was ten minutes past eight if I remember correctly. It seems to me that, because I used to take my (--) I used to take a bus from the farm, you know, at 7:30, or 7:25 if I remember. Now 7:25, and I'd walk to the railroad station. Then from the railroad station I had another walk to my office. And that was, that was about a half and hour I think.

Y: So how long did you commute. Ten years?

M: Ten years. But in the winter I would stay if the weather was bad, and if I felt like it. We had friends that lived in Roxbury. So I would stay there and commute from there to, with the elevators, you know? But that wasn't too frequently. Like in the winter when it was real cold, or if it wasn't real bad, I'd wind up there.

Y: So back to the question. Did you like your job?

M: Did I like my job. It was a cinch! You know, because the boss wasn't there, you know.

Y: You were the boss and everything, you know? How many people worked there?

M: Well there were three of us. We have an accountant that came in only periodically. And a lady that was there before I was, and she was older than I was. And she uh, so there was just really the two of us in the office. And of course in the back the girls were putting up the powder in the boxes, you know. And they, and they had a couch in the back, you know. So if I was tired I was able to, you know, rest if I wanted to. And uh (-)

Y: That's a nice job. [laughs]

M: It was a nice little (--) Well that lasted ten years. Then I went to, I think it was the Column (--) No, it was on Columbus Avenue. It was some electric company. And oh, this is so different.

Y: Wait a minute. If you started 1930, I mean Depression started in 1929 -30. And uh, so you worked ten years, it must have been 1940.

M: No, no. No, no, no. I worked from the time that, wait a minute. Uh, 25, 25 to 30. No, 1940 I was getting married in 1940.

Y: You have us confused within years. Maybe you started early, not 1930? You graduated from the High School 1925.

M: In 1925, so I started to work from 1925 to (--) Well we were, we were still in that place after the depression just maybe a years or two, and it began to go down. They had to give it up. So um, you know.

Y: Maybe 1925 to 35, or something? (M: Um) Or 26 to 36?

M: It could be about that. Because I worked (--) See I figured that I worked in the Wood Mill for ten years I thought.

Y: You worked in the Wood Mill?

M: In the office, after I got through with Boston. I didn't finish the story. Then I worked in an electric company. (Y: How long?) Oh I didn't work there too long. I went in for inventory and oh that was a terrible job. You know, they, they pushed a button and the bell rang, and you went to the ladies room, to the rest rooms. Than they pushed the button and you had to come back at that time. I mean there was no, no vacation at that job.

Y: What? That was the electric company?

M: The electric company.

Y: What do you mean pushed the bell.

M: Well they had a bell ring a signal, and you all got up and you went to the ladies room.

Y: So everyone knew that you are leaving.

M: Yeah. [Both laugh] And then they rang the bell and you came back. And I thought oho, this is like, like being the cow. You know, being called to pasture and then you know, called back. And I thought that was (--) And they wanted me to work. Now I'm a good worker. I really am. And I, whatever I do I like to do, I like to do it right. And you know, they wanted to keep me on. And oh, I said, "never, I would never want to work there." So I gave that up.

Y: What did you say how long did you work at the electric company? One year, two years?

M: Oh no, no. The electric company was there very short lived. I'd say (Y: months) maybe six months or so.

Y: And then you came back to Lawrence?

M: Then I came to Lawrence. And then I got the job at uh, (--) Oh I worked for a fiber company on Canal Street for I don't remember how long, when they had the big flood. They had a big flood.

Y: 1936.

M: Yeah, so I was working there for I don't know, maybe for a couple of years or so. And then (--)

Y: Fiber company? They produce fiber?

M: Uh, yeah, for cloth. You know, like they (--) Flocking the cloth making it like fur. You know, they flock it. An interesting process.

Y: I heard (--) That is not the same company. I heard, I read in the newspaper that there's a, there was a company in Lawrence which produced that kind of material. Even they used for "King Kong". Is it the same kind of material?

M: Oh it could be. Yeah, it could be, yeah.

Y: And then uh, from there you (--)

M: It sort of looked like velvet, you know. I mean it was uh (--)

Y: But it was not velvet. It was uh, some synthetic.

M: Like fur, yeah. Yeah.

Y: And from there you went to Wood Mill, from the Wood Mill.

M: From there I worked in the Wood Mill. And I worked there till I got married. That was 1940.

Y: 1940. So you quit when you got there.

M: Well I worked one year after I married. (Y: After the marriage) And then I quit.

Y: So in 1941 you quit? (M: Yeah) What did you do in the Wood Mills?

M: Uh, I was secretary, and uh, uh, oh there are, you know they had an awful lot of um, gee, what did they call them? Um, they had you worked by a stop watch you know, to see how much work you could do. You know, I mean they came to me to see how much a person could do, because I was a good worker. You know, they wouldn't take anybody that was very slow. But I was reliable. And uh, so they used to clock me to see how (--)

Y: That was uh, uh, Efficiency Experts?

M: Yes. Yeah. Yeah, that's what they called them.

Y: That was around in 1936-37?

M: No, I'd say about that. Yeah.

Y: They were around in the Wood Mills?

M: Yeah, it was just about that time, yes.

Y: Even they timed people in the offices? I thought they just did it with the workers in the machine shop.

M: No, well I suppose you know, when they're trying to produce, you know, and they want to see how much would can be put out, because uh, we also, I also operated um, well it was not just the typewriter, but uh, they punch cards, you know. And then they have the sorters. The cards all you know, fall in the proper place, because they have to punch you know, the date, what salaries they're making. And the person's name in alphabetical order. And so um, they had all these machines. And of course like the bookkeeping machines, I don't know what they called them at that time, but ooh, the accounting sheets, you know, that came out. And these great big machines that they operated.

Y: But what's the name really? Efficiency expert? Was it the name?

M: Um...

Y: They're called efficiency expert for inside the shop, but I was wondering if they are the same people.

M: Well it had a lot to do with efficiency. What do they call them?

Y: It was the name for the mill workers inside. They timed everything. If you go to the bathroom, they timed how long it would take.

M: Oh really? Oh jeeze, them too? I thought that was only happening where I was working at that time. But um, (--)

Y: So there wasn't any time when you worked in the electric company for socializing, if they were so (--)

M: Oh no. No, no, no. There's no, no time for socializing at all.

Y: I mean you couldn't even talk to people around you?

M: Well not too much. No, because everything was so mechanical. You know, everything had to keep moving. So that I didn't like that after what I had. You know, I had such an easy job.

Y: So you worked starting from high school, I mean after graduating from the high school. You worked in that [unclear] company, and then electric company, and then came back to Lawrence, worked fiber company, and then the Wood Mills. (M: Umhm) Which one did you like most?

M: Uh, well the Wood Mills was very good. I enjoyed that.

Y: What did you enjoy? The people, or did you enjoy your work, or?

M: Well I enjoyed the people. I enjoyed my boss. My boss and I had a terrific rapport. And um, I don't know, I was just appreciated. You know, when they appreciate you, you know, it's a different attitude. You're comfortable, you know? And I could always go to my boss. I had the main uh, what was it, Mr. Lamonthe. I used to uh, this isn't on me. Is that on?

Y: It is on. Should I turn it off?

M: Yeah, because I wanted (--)

Y: Recognition is important I can imagine. I mean when you do something, one expects that it is recognized.

M: That's right. That's right.

Y: That's what you got in the Wood Mills?

M: That's what I got in the Wood Mill. Yes, that was (--)

Y: Did you get promotion also in uh, those places?

M: Uh, well no. There wasn't anything to be promoted to. You know?

Y: I mean uh, the money part was not important?

M: Oh you know, when I started I started at eighteen dollars. (Y: A week?) And I, eighteen dollars a week. (Y: Yeah) I took care of my bus fare. I took care of my train fare. Well it wasn't that much, you know?

Y: Well you spend all, all the money on the way.

M: I'd probably have about five dollars left, you know. [both giggle]

Y: Didn't your father say, "sit here and don't go anywhere."

M: No. No, no. My father was very (--)

Y: Why did you go to Boston, not in Lawrence?

M: Well um, a lady across the street used to work for Lawyer Clay, and he was an up and coming lawyer here in Lawrence. And she was, oh she was in maybe about fifty-five or so. Maybe older than that. Of course when I was, young you know, older, you know, not so old for them. And uh, she thought, you know, that she would you know, get me a job. Or I mentioned it to her. And then she said to me, "why don't you join the women's club. The Lawrence Sorosis", I think they called it, "Club". And um, they wouldn't take me because I was Catholic. (Y: Yeah) Yeah, Catholic, yeah. So finally the girls, the girls in Methuen started, there's a lawyer up the street, well his wife started a Catholic group, you know? So I belong to that group now. That's the Methuen one in the Civic Club. And um, so that I thought, gee, you know, how am I going to get into Lawrence, you know? I suppose I could have tried, but this lady that went with me was you know, up and coming. She was aggressive, you know, a little more aggressive than I. And if I was going alone, I don't think I would have gone alone. But I mean she was the one that instilled that motivation, you know? And so I went with her, and I was just lucky. And like I say, I have a guardian angel.

Y: You know, in the newspaper two weeks ago I saw someone ask, what is sidekick income? Sidekick income? And the answer is job satisfaction other than money and other benefits. If you just love your work that is sidekick income. Was it such a thing in those days? I mean did you love your job, or did you get the feeling of satisfaction?

M: Well I did. I'll tell you why I got it. I feel, see I didn't have a college education. I feel that my having worked in Boston gave me a lot that I wouldn't have got had I worked in Lawrence. I met a lot of people on the train, you know, lawyers and doctors. I mean I didn't know them personally. Some of them I did know by name, but I, I didn't know them. And it was just getting out with a lot of other people. And all of the kids are going to school too. They were all going to college, some of them, you know? Some of the girls that I knew were working at the State House. They had state jobs. And uh, a lot of the [name unclear] girls worked at the State House. And so it was an education being on the train, and meeting different ones. Of course you met young men too, you know. And uh, it, and you're always thinking about your appearance, you know. I'm a strickler for appearance. Dressing up means a lot to me, you know. And in fact, the property means a lot to me. See I take care of it. A lot of people don't bother, but I do. I love my home, but that's getting off the subject.

Y: That was kind of a prestigious thing?

M: Well yes. It was.

Y: To go, I mean from uh, from a farm to Boston, which is a cultural center.

M: I didn't really think of it that way, but as it evolved, you know, I feel that I got a lot out of it.

Y: So you were satisfied?

M: Yes, I was satisfied.

Y: I was talking about the job satisfaction.

M: Well I was satisfied. But you know, after awhile you get, "oh, I'm getting kind of sick of this." So one of the girls was saying, "gee, what do you say we study nursing, you know" My brother was studying to be a doctor at that time. And uh, he said, if you did I'll [whispers knotty words]. So that's what he thought of it, you know, my going into that, you know. So what did I do. I knew another lady who was, well she's an attorney now, but not very prominent. And um, she was going to go to Law School, to Porscia Law School, on Mt. Vernon Street in Boston. And so I thought I would go. So I went for six months. That wasn't for me. You know, I knew it. It was not for me. I said, "I'd never make a lawyer." The most I'll do will probably set up, well look up cases, you know. But a lawyer, I'm not aggressive enough. I'm not, I don't have the punch, you know. I said, "I, I know what I'm" (--) The best I'm going to be is a wife and a mother. That's the best I'm going to be. And that's what I am. So that's the work that I love the best. Taking care of the family and taking care of my property.

Y: But you said the Wood Mill you liked.

M: Oh yeah, I liked that. Well it was a phase in my life, you know. I had to meet some men.

Y: Some people say that one likes people, or one likes the job. I mean some people go to work because they like people they work with, and some people like what they do. And I wonder which category you felt in the Wood Mill.

M: Oh, I would be, I am the workaholic. I like, I can't say that I don't like people. I like people, but I can only take so much of it, you know? I mean I'm uh, I'm not bragging about it, but I'm a loner.

Y: But you said you like the people in the Wood Mills. (M: Oh yes) Your boss and (--)

M: I think we were friendly. We all went out, the girls and I all went out to eat, you know? In fact we took a lot of, oh, I've got to show you all the pictures that are(--)

Y: So I have a picture. I numbered that picture number 10. And it is, it was taken in 1932 (M: 32) in Salisbury Beach. And uh, Mildred is, how would you describe you in the picture.



M: Let's say maybe second row.

Y: There is no row actually, but somewhere between the first row and the second row, between, behind the (--)

M: On the right of the uh, first row. (Y: There's a boy) Above the, above the right of the first row.

Y: Yeah. And who are the other people? I see you were surrounded by boys.

M: [Laughs] Well they were all over the place. These were you know, boys, these boys were from Haverhill, these boys were from Billerica. And uh, you know, there was only, yeah, most of those were from, from Haverhill. This one was from Billerica.

Y: And so you went there as a group, or (--)

M: Yeah, as a group.

Y: That was friends I guess.

M: Yeah, we all went by car, you know, pile in and go.

Y: I heard, someone told me one could go to Haverhill and take the street cars from Haverhill.

M: Oh sure! Sure, they had streetcars.

Y: All the way to Salisbury Beach?

M: Yes. Yes.

Y: The first one is Paula, right?

M: The first one is Paula.

Y: And the second one is Phillip?

M: Phillip is the second one.

Y: What does Phillip do?

M: Oh he's,

Y: Well he's managing the hotel.

M: I have to show you what he's doing.

Y: We are talking about Mildred's son, Phil, who, there's an article you have here. And the title is "High pay Executive quit his job to run a small country inn which is in Vermont". And he was working uh (--) The Inn's name is the "Black Bear Inn" in Bolton. (M: Bolton) B O L T O N Valley, Vermont. And you said he worked in Minneapolis?

M: Yeah, he worked in Minneapolis for the same company, Gould.

Y: Gould to [unclear].

M: Gould, G O U L D. (Y: u l d) Then in Canada, then in um, then he gave it up. He wanted to be on his own. He wasn't happy. (Y: It says here in the article) With the hours that he had to spend.

Y: He hated his job, because of long hours?

M: Long hours, and very well paying, but he was willing to give it up to be on his own. To do, he finds that he works harder now probably, but he's doing it for himself. And he's exceptionally, exceptionally um, (Y: successful) successful.

Y: [Unclear] says quote, "I never took a vacation longer than three days because there was always some crisis. It was impossible to get away." That is unquote. That is him. Is there any picture of him (M: Uh, yes) in the (--) That's the end of side B.

Tape II, side A

Y: ...Mildred's husband who's name was uh, (M: Peter McKinnis) Peter. And uh, I remember from last time talking to you that he would spend sometime outside talking to patients. And you said something, you cannot do that because you don't have time to chat. Well what uh (--)

M: Oh, that was in, that was in the office. A lady came in with a whole stack of vacation pictures. And she was holding, I happened to be in the office at the time, because the girl was on vacation so I was taking over. [Unclear] the people are coming in, there's no place to sit, and I'm saying, gee, now what's holding him? Finally this lady comes out. You know, usually I'll knock at the door, you know. This lady comes out with a stack of pictures and she sits down. And that's a mistake, you should never have a chair by your desk, you know. Because I noticed that they don't do that where I go to the office now. They're all enclosed and you can't even talk to them, you know. So I um, she sat down and she had this, and she's going through the pictures. I was no more interested in those pictures. I didn't even know the women, you know? And I said to my husband later on, I said, you know "you can't do that. You're too good. You know, just forget about it. You know, just tell them that you are moving on." Or if people come into the office and

they're ready to leave, he will say well, "and how is your mother?" You know. [chuckles] I said, "don't do that honey. I says, you know that starts a whole new you know, conversation." Another time a lady, uh, he's visiting a sick patient in the hospital. This, this was told to me. And uh, he goes into the hospital. And he approaches the patient's bed, you know, and talking to them. So the patient that was next to the doctor's patient said after he left, who's your doctor? And she told him. He said, "gee, my doctor doesn't do that." Pete comes in you know, he says, "well how are you feeling?" And you know, he'll feel your pulse, you know? And uh, so she says uh, "gee, my doctor doesn't do that. They come in the door, well how are you feeling?" You know, and then out they go. And they get their you know, fee, and they don't even pay any attention to you. Glad to be rid of you. That's you know, when he first started, because I, I don't have another one.

Y: Let me see. What year is this uh? Let's put the number. Number 10. (M: speaking along with Yilderey, but cannot comprehend) Number 10. So that is number 11. And uh, this Peter was his name. (M: Peter) Yeah, Peter (M: McKinnis) McKinnis. Where did he go to the Medical School?

M: Uh, he went to um, Middlesex. (Y: Middlesex?) Yeah, Middlesex.

Y: So it must be what year more or less? Uh, an estimation.

M: Let's see, we got married in 19 (Y: '41?) 40, we got married in 1940. So he, he probably graduated about 1936, or '37.

Y: Umhm. And how did you meet him?

M: It was very funny. I, I really met him through my brother John. Do you know he used to play the violin, and my brother John played the piano. And while he was going to school you know, they had to make money. And uh, especially for dates, you know, or whatnot, but he wasn't dating me at the time. He wasn't one that dated anyhow, you know? He was sort of a loner. We, we get along swell, because he's a loner and I'm a loner. And he um, was playing with my brother John at one of the uh, little cubby holes, you know, on Union Street. And he said to my brother, "gee, do you think your sister would go to a dance with me?" This was uh (--)

Y: So he knew you?

M: Oh yeah, our parents knew each other. And I knew of him. And isn't it funny, you know, I said, "now there's nobody in Lawrence for me, but him I would consider." I was two years older than him too. So uh, John said [unclear]. So while we're washing the cans you know, on the farm, that's how I was found. So Johnny says, "you know, Peter asked me if you'd like to go to a dance with him. He says, would you go?" And I says, "oh sure!" You know, I'm tickled to death. Gee, at last, you know? So um, he took me to the dance and (--)

Y: Where did you go?

M: Where did we go?

Y: Yeah, dancing.

M: Oh, it might have been at the Copley Plaza. Some school in some hotel in Boston. I think it was the Copley Hotel.

Y: And it says here in New York, the picture is taken on 20 West 57th Street in New York City.

M: Well that was taken in his office. That's his office.

Y: Hm, where was that?

M: On Jackson Street.

Y: Jackson Street?

M: Yeah. Do you know where Avon Street is? At the lights? Well we were in the white house with a big porch. That's where he had his office.

Y: So he was a medical doctor?

M: Yeah, General Practitioner. (Y: General Practitioner) Yeah. He was always interested in, first he was interested in pediatrics, but then he was going to be too tied down with babies, you know. So he decided he didn't want to do that. And he was thinking of geron, geronto, (Y: geron) Gerontology, (Y: Gerontology?) with the old folks, because he was very good with old people. So uh (--) (Y: And uh) I mean (--)

Y: That was the kind of doctor he was?

M: Yeah, the kind of a doctor he was.

Y: That is number 12, and uh, Dr. Peter is examining his patient. Do you know the patient? No.

M: No I don't.

Y: Do you know when it were, and when, and why this picture was taken?

M: Oh it was, I don't, well maybe a parent you know, wanted a picture of their doctor, you know?

Y: Yeah. It must be at home then, it seems?

M: Yeah, at home. It was at the home of that patient, whoever that was. There's nothing on the back of that, is there?

Y: No, except the number I put. But he looks a little bit uh, so it must be what? What did you say what year this one was? 1936?

M: Oh, that would be about 1936 I think.

Y: 36ish. And uh, I should put a question mark. And that must be ten years, fifteen years afterwards? Who knows?

M: Oh, about that I'd say.

Y: Yeah. Uh, so 1950's would be a good guesstimation, (M: Well!) or is this too late? (M: 1950, let's see) Early 50's?

M: Yeah it could be.

Y: This is number 13, and Mildred is under, this is you? (M: Yeah) Uh, the first from right. And some of the girls are co-workers. Which ones?

M: Well they were all, they were working in the back of the uh, they were putting us the um, [powders?].

Y: That was when you were working in the Levy's?

M: When I was working in Ben Levy's, yeah. (Y: Ben Levy's) And she was, she was the one that worked with me. We both worked together.

Y: So the third one from left uh, was working with Mildred. What was her name?

M: Um, Ann McCarthy.

Y: McCarthy, like the regular McCarthy?

M: The regular McCarthy.

Y: And uh, anyone else?

M: Oh gee, I don't remember their names. (Y: You don't uh?) I don't remember their names at all.

Y: And what was taken in Boston Common?

M: Yeah, that was taken in the Boston Common.

Y: And what is your estimation of year?

M: Well uh, did I have anything else?

Y: So the year uh, is about 1930. And uh, okay. I take this and if I don't use it, that's uh, number 14 is uh, Charles who became and doctor, medical doctor. And he went to which school?

M: He went to Tufts.

Y: Tufts. And uh, here he is doing what?

M: Well I guess looking up slides. (Y: Microscope) Yeah, microscope. Microscopic slides.

Y: And what year should we say it was taken?

M: Uh, let's see now. I graduated in 1925, and he was going to, so he's in medical school now. '25. So let's see.

Y: About 1929 or 30, while he was in the medical school. Your father passed away 1948.

M: 1948.

Y: So how old was he I wonder? Does it say?

M: No, not on here. He was seventy-two when he passed away. (Y: 72?) 72 or 74.

Y: Well that's good enough. So uh (--)

M: And my mother passed away in 1948. And this cousin got shot. This is a cousin my uh (--)

Y: That was number, that was number 15, uh, the new one. That is 14. And that is, well there's no place to write, but uh (--)

M: Well can't you write on the back here?

Y: Yeah, 15. And uh, can you tell me a little bit again? Although the tape was not on. So that (--)

M: Oh, you mean about the picture?

Y: About the picture?

M: Well it won first prize at the Lawrence uh (--) Oh wait a minute. First prize at the (Y: Merrimack Mill) Merrimack Valley Artist Association.

Y: So you paint, it was in 1977.

M: Umhm. And then it got a third prize at Topsfield Fair in 1971. I wonder? That says 1971.

Y: It says 1971 there. And so you paint in your spare time?

M: Well I did up to the time my husband passed away. And then, I mean it's a very lonely job you know, sitting up there all by yourself. So when he used to go out he'd be the first one at the Bon. He'd leave by oh, about quarter to eight. He'd be the first doctor that would appear at the Bons. His light would be the first one on. And so I had, you know, plenty of time like to you know, to straighten up whatever I had to do. And then I went upstairs and I painted. And uh, sometimes I'd even forget about lunch I'd be so involved. I have to show you my paintings. I have a lot of them on the wall. No, these are all (--)

Y: So your daughters pictures were in the front, your Paula?

M: What do you mean in the front?

Y: Here, there are some pictures. (M: Oh yeah, yeah. Did you want?) Is there any coming?

M: Uh, no, I don't think so. These are all concerts that I had attended. (Y: Oh)

Y: So this is a picture of Paula. And according to the newspaper article here, she has completed requirements for a Master's Degree in Education with a Major in Secondary in Reading at Boston University. So she's a graduate of BU huh?

M: Of BU and Leslie College.

Y: A graduate of Tenney Memorial High School. T E N N E Y. Miss McKinnis received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from Leslie College in 1964, and did graduate work at the University of New Hampshire for a year. She has been a reading specialist at Methuen Junior High School for the past four years. Where does she work now?

M: Well she's at the uh, uh, well they call it the Timothy, Timothy Middle School. (Y: Timothy?) Timothy, yeah, because he just got shot. Not shot, he had a heart attack on account of the situation that progressed at the school. And so they named the school after him. It was the Methuen Middle School, but it's now the Timothy, Timothy Middle School.

Y: So um, I didn't give any number to this picture, but let's see. It must be number 16 then. Uh, I want to ask you?

M: Would you like a cup of coffee and a sandwich?

Y: No, I shouldn't give you those troubles.

M: Because I have it.

Y: I want to ask you about the um, there are such beliefs for example, I sometimes do that when I leave home, I try to step out of my right uh, right step, right foot. Did you hear, I mean, so called superstitions. Everyone has uh, (--) (M: oh, superstitions?) And uh, anyone, or anything you remember like uh, some people say, "oh twenty-four is a good number for me because I did this. I was born in 1924 and (--)" Anything uh, you have such uh, (--)

M: Well, as uh, as kids if you stepped on a crack in the sidewalk, somebody was going to pass away in the family. Or if you walked under a ladder, or if a black cat ran in front of you, you were going to have bad luck. (Y: Right) But um, yeah, you know, the older folks used to have some superstitions, but I don't seem to be able to recall anything. (Y: Yeah) Oh I suppose you have a whole [unclear] of questions.

Y: Well this is from books. And I was wondering if you like uh, it says, "never wear new overalls on a new job, on the first day, or you will have bad luck on the job." (M: Chuckles) Anyway, thank you so much.

M: Oh, and you're welcome.

Y: I appreciate it.

[Tape is turned off and then on again]

M: And you took a trolley. And they had house lots for sale. Of course all this area in Methuen, by the Merrimack Valley Country Club, (Y: umhm) and a lot of the Pleasant Valley area was just farmland, you know, or um, not farmland but just uh, you know, lots.

Y: When was that? 1920's?

M: Yeah it must have been, because we were just kids. And uh, you had a free trolley ride with the family. And when you got there they had prizes. And gee, I remember clocks, and pictures, and bowls, and you know, different little things that you got for a prize. And um, so that was what you did, you know, for excitement.

Y: But uh, you had to buy a lot, or it was not uh (--)



M: I think it was there for those that were interested in you know, buying a lot to plant, or whatever, you know. And I think that's how they uh, you know, when they used to have these Victory Gardens, I think that um, they had land too. But let's see, when did they have the Victory Gardens? That would be about what? 1920?

Y: 1941, later.

M: 1941?

Y: 1941, during the war. (M: unclear) But the other, other, the other gardens in Pleasant Valley, I think they were sold in 1920' as you said.

M: Um, it must have been about that time.

Y: So did they, I wonder if they sold uh, also plots for garden, or just for, to build a house?

M: Oh, I think they sold plots for gardens, because I don't think too many people could afford to. At that time you weren't just building a house, you know, you, you were renting. Most of the people were renting.

Y: Umhm.

M: But my father had a little money when he came, (Y: Umhm) or he wouldn't have been able to buy the house. He bought the house about 10 years after he was, just about ten years after he came to America. And uh (--)

Y: How, how, where did you get the money?

M: Well I told you he operated this cab.

Y: Oh yeah, you (--) Right, umhm.

M: And he had, my brother Johnny says he had three horses. So he must have had others drive him too. And used to you know, made that way. And he came by himself. He came first. And then his wife followed later on. Then my brother John and Charlie, they came from (--) Well they really came from Lithuania, but they were born in Latvia.

Y: Umhm. So Johnny is born, was born in 1903?

M: 1901. (Y: one?) Umhm. And I was born 1907. My brother Charlie was born about 1903. And uh, my brother Peter was born, oh maybe about 1909.

Y: So he's the baby one?

M: He's the baby. He's 79.

Y: Where does he live? In Andover you said?

M: He lives in Andover. He's got a very nice home. Beautiful home. He was in the grain business. (Y: What kind?) Grain. (Y: Hm) And he had um, during the war he had uh, chicken farms out in Maine, and that's how he made his money, in grain. But he studied business. He studied Business Administration. So that was what he did well at.

Y: But your father seemed to be far in advance of his time. Uh, he (--)

M: Well he uh, you know, when you're a kid you don't listen too much. Or if you do, it's just something that happened, and you don't pay too much attention to it. (Y: Yeah) But like I say, my brother Johnny was home a good part of the time. So that he got more, more out, more of the conversation. And not that my father didn't mention it, like when we were sitting at the table, or whatever. He, he'd always laugh and, especially if we were eating you know, and if you use too much, too much butter or something you know. He'd say in Lithuania you know, the people think that the pigeons eat gold here. And that the uh, that you put shovels full of butter on your bread. That it comes easy, you know.

Y: You don't speak Lithuanian. Did you learn um,? (M: Yes, I) You did?

M: I learned to speak it and I learned to write it. I can read it too. But you know, you pick up a Lithuanian paper, and oh my God, it's such an effort to read you know, because you haven't read it for a long time. And you're not at it all the time, not like a newspaper, like American newspaper. But um, I do, I can interpret a letter, or whatever. We went to Sunday school and that was where we learned, you know. We had classes.

Y: I wonder how your father learned English, or your mother?

M: Oh, my mother didn't speak it too well. Of course she was always confined with the family. Of course when, when we lived on Chestnut Street, at that time the immigrants were coming in. So all these ladies that you see in that picture were all boarders at our house. And I remember as a kid, washing the lampshades. You know, they used to have a kerosene lamp on their dresser. And you had to wash that every, well every Friday or Saturday. Come the end of the week you'd start cleaning up. And you had floors to wash. Your floors didn't have linoleum. Only I remember at the very very end, just about before we moved from Chestnut street, we had a linoleum put in our dining room. But uh, they didn't uh, didn't have those things. So uh, we had uh, oh we had about three young ladies, and we had two young men at our house besides the children, you know? There were four of us.

Y: You said that your mother took care of the boarders too. She cooked for them and she washed for them.

M: That's right, she was a cook.

Y: She must have been a terribly busy lady.

M: She was, but she was always sick with a headache, you know. And when you think of it now, no wonder, you know. No wonder she was sick. But uh, it must have been hard.

Y: Migraine headache?

M: Yeah.

Y: Yeah, I remember from last, our last talk um, you mentioned that uh, (--)

M: Could you have another sandwich? (Y: No) You sure? (Y: No, thanks) Well have a cookie.

Y: You said that she used to drink whiskey from a snake, or something.

M: Yes. Yeah, she used to have a bottle, and the snake was right in the bottle. And uh, I don't know whether it was suppose to be for something special, or whether it was um, um, (--)

Y: It's folk medicine, you know. (M: Yeah, I suppose so.) [unclear] I wonder where did she get the snake. I mean how did, what kind of snake?

M: I don't know.

Y: Probably it was, she got a little bit um, drunk or so. Who knows? I mean from that drink, or maybe it was just uh, the belief um, that she would get better.

M: I don't remember her really taking it, you know. My mother wasn't one that you know, drank. She usually used to take this Capudine. There used to be a picture in the drug store with a devil and his you know, fork, and batting your head, you know. And so she started to take that Capudine. And my brother, when he became a doctor, said "Ma you shouldn't be taking that", because it was um, I don't know, maybe it had codeine or something, I don't know.

Y: Was she young when she died?

M: No, she was uh, she was seventy-two. I think my father was seventy-four when he died. And my mother died at seventy-two. My husband died at seventy-two. And here I am. And I'm thinking you know, when we're going out, we were you know, keeping company, I knew that I was older than him, you know. And uh, I never, never used to mention marriage. We went out together for four years. And he used to say, "well you know, I'm just a student." I says, "well I know you are, you know, you don't have to tell

me you're a student." But I think it came to a point, his mother and father didn't talk good English, you know. He had to have a telephone. [Laughs] So I laughed, "I know why you married me, so I could answer your telephone."

Y: But did your husband uh, I guess you know, that is the way around. Like I, my wife is so many years younger than me. In those days was it a big issue that um, that you were two years older?

M: No. No. I know that you could be an old maid you know, by the time you were thirty-four years old and you're not married. What's the matter with her? You know. That was the attitude they took. What's the matter with her, she hasn't got (--) But I have a lot of friends. Lot of friends, as you can see in the pictures. I had many many friends.

Y: Why did you wait so long? Nobody was right?

M: I knew what I wanted. [chuckles] I knew what I wanted. I don't know. You know I say that I have a guardian angel, because I have no fear. I have no fear about, if I'm going to be an old maid, I'll be an old maid if that's what they want to call me. But that never never bothered me. I was really, I was in church a lot, you know? Um, the spiritual means a lot to me. In fact right now, you know, I just had them call me from the library. They were saving a book for me. They had to get it from Lowell. "The Sign of Jonah's" is one that I'm reading now. And this is a journal by a trappist. And the first book that I read of the Tom Merton, Thomas Merton, it changed, it changed my life. When I think of it, it has really set me on a course. This, "The Seven Story Mountain" is the name of the book. And it's the different plateaus that this individual is looking for. He's, he was born in France, his father was an artist. And uh, he was born in France, then he went to school in England. He went to Cambridge. And he was um, well he was like a renegade. You know, I mean he was having a hell of a time when he was in school. Girls and drinking, and anything that the college students did, he was at the head of it, you know? And he was not a good looking man. He was just regular height, you know, and just very ordinary looking. And uh, he writes this book about how he comes about getting where he is now. And I was so smitten at that book. I've read many book after him. I've read books that are written by friends that knew him very very well. And of course he was an author too, but this was really his first book, his very first book. And I'm just reading now in "The Sign of Jonah's", he's talking about, because this is like uh, like a diary and he's mentioning this "Seven Story Mountain", and how excited he is that he's really you know, writing something and they're excepting it, you know? And he doesn't think that he's an orphan. He's written a lot of poetry. He's writing poetry like made! So he (--)

Tape II, side one ends

Tape II, side two begins

M: Joining the uh, Gethsemane Trappist Order in Kentucky. And he slowly, of course he's a novice, and he slowly graduates you know, to other things. And he's such a personable individual that everybody just loves to (--) And when he's writing this book you have an idea that he's really talking to you and he knows where you're at, you know? That's just the way this book is. And I'm not the only one that's saying it. Everybody else that I read about make any remarks about that book, they all say the same thing. And I read a book by friends of his who are very very well known individuals. Authors, and Cardinals, and priests and what have you. All the uh, upper people in the echelon. You know, they're writing their opinion of him, and they're all saying that it's just like he's talking to you. And he knows just what he's saying. And it just appeals to you so much. So I was taking, after my husband passed away, you know you don't want to do anything. And this lady next door just came in for, well she lives here, but her parents were in Lebanon. In fact her brother just bought this house next door too. They're here now about seven years. Wonderful people. And uh, so she said, "Mildred, you know, I'm going to Canada. Would you like to come with me?" And I had just met her. And I said, "well gee, I don't know. I really don't feel up to it." She says, "well come on." So all right. So we went to Canada. And she, when she told me that she was going to a wedding out there and that she had relatives out there, I thought, I didn't care about just going to Canada, but if I was going to be in a group where they were going to you know, have a good time and something different, I said, "sure, I'll go." So we went and she had a, she was going to a wedding. A father who had five daughters, he was marrying off his fourth one. We went to the wedding, had a wonderful time! Belly dancing, and they were doing all belly dancing. And oh of course we had to get into it too. We had a good time, real good time. And then we went to Canada from there. And she had other cousins that we stayed over here for about two or three days. Then we went to Canada. And uh, she was a wonderful companion. Much, much younger than I was. In fact, I showed you pictures of it.

Y: Yeah, I remember. And uh, so I (--) Oh, just, I started to say, just before I went to Canada I was coming, passing the Nevins Memorial Library in Methuen. In the meantime I had been going to Lawrence with my library card. But I didn't seem to enjoy it so much. The parking is terrible. You can't find a place to park. And I had a bad ankle. Oh, that was another thing. I had a bad angle and I broke it in 1952 And so this was another thing that was holding me back from you know, traveling or whatever. So I thought, well gee, I think I'll go into the Methuen Library and get a card, and see if I can get that Thomas Merton book again. This was the second time.

Y: Merton, M U , or O U?

M: M E R T O N , yeah, Tom Merton. So I uh, went into the library, and sure enough they had it. It was his autobiography. And it is so interesting.

Y: I should read it.

M: It is, you will love it! Because everybody really enjoys that book so much. And from that book there are so many other books that, (--) I've read about five or six. "The

Ascent to Heaven”, the you know, whatever. And “Inquest of Freedom”, meaning freedom of your soul, or whatever. But these are all very uplifting books. Very very. So I got my brother reading now. And he loves to read. He’s reading my classics, you know. He’s really reading those. He’s even studying “War and Peace”. And I said, “Johnny, are you going to get through that?” I said, “I don’t even dare start it because it’s so thick you know, and it’s so dull. I don’t know how far he got in it, but he’s not reading it anymore. But now he’s reading the Bible, because I read the Bible every morning. But I just read like a passage, you know. There all numbers and I’ll just read one. Maybe I might read two passages. So he’s reading that. He says, “Gee Mildred, this is the best book that I’ve ever read.” And I said, “well Johnny, I’m so glad that you’re enjoying it.” So I have it by my chair, and every now and then he picks it up. And he reads more than I do of the Bible. So he’s a wonderful companion, because we’re both of the same mind, you know. He, he thinks like I do, and we’re uh, we’re feeling like we’re looking for a passage to heaven. We’re getting so close to it, you know. [Laughs] But um, and that’s, that’s about that book. But there are so many other books that he has written, but this is the one that really strikes you as something that gets you, gets you right here. You know, you can’t help it. It’s a wonderful book. So I stepped into that library and it was the best thing I did, because it’s so great. I go about every three weeks and I come home with three books. And uh, so I go to the library often now. About every three weeks I’ll go and uh, oh I’ll get a book on fiction. But you know, fiction by Danielle Steel, and you know, and all these, they’re so you know, so empty. After you’ve read one, they’re all the same, you know. [Laughs] They’re all the same!

Y: John did never get married, right?

M: No. He was going out with a very nice lady. In fact, she’s just about his age, and she’s very sick right now. And uh, he said she talks too much. When she gets on the telephone you can’t get away from it, you know. And then she’s got so many relatives. She’s always telling about the relatives. She says, he says, I can’t even keep track of them! I think she out smarted herself. She really out did herself. But uh, no, John wants to be alone. He wants to be alone. One day uh, oh this was about maybe about six, or (-- ) He’s with me now a year and four months. He lived along in an apartment at the Immaculate, you know. And he had a very nice apartment, very nice. So he uh, one day said to me, “you know, I’d rather be alone.” I said, “really Johnny?” He wanted to go into the nursing home. I said, “Johnny, do you want to go into the nursing home?” I got rid of all of his furniture. I went through so much to clean up his apartment and get rid of all of his furniture, and stuff that he had. Gee. So I said, “are you sure you want to go into the nursing home? I said you know, you say you’re a loner, you want to be alone. I said, if you go to the nursing home, you’re not going to be alone. You’re going to be in the room with somebody, and that somebody might snore and might be always talking and bothering you. You won’t be able to do what you want to do. I said, here, you know.” He’s in his room and he does his you know, praying and meditation, whatever. Before he goes to daycare, which is about nine o’clock, he’s all dressed. Now he’s able to dress himself. In the beginning he couldn’t. When he was with me in the beginning I had to help him dress, because he’s got a bad shoulder and so he’s kind of bent. So, he

plays the piano every morning before he leaves. And I noticed this morning he was playing, but it was very soft like he didn't have, didn't have any life in him I didn't say anything. I just thought, well it must be an off day, you know. He wasn't really putting his heart and soul in it. So he um, I kind of talked him out of it.

Y: He was a musician for his (--) What?

M: Well he, he was just teaching piano. I mean he, he studied with the um, um, Sisters at the Assumption Church. They used to have the Sisters there, the Dominican Sisters. And the Sisters gave piano lessons, and violin lessons. And my brother Charlie was taking Violin lessons from them. And while we were growing up we always went to concerts that they had at the church. And uh, whatever they had there we went. Although we belonged to Saint Francis. And uh, so, and then he took, he took an advance course with, with the Sisters. But uh, I don't know. My daughter took piano lessons. And when she took piano lessons, she had to, she had to have recitals in order to get her degrees. But you know, she doesn't play the piano at all now.

Y: Where was the opera house? I heard that in Lawrence there was an opera house. Sixth Street or so?

M: Oh, the Rialto. (Y: Rialto?) The Rialto, R A, R I A L T O. So that was the Rialto. And uh, they probably did have opera.

Y: But you never attend the [unclear]?

M: No. Uh, then it was changed into a movie house. (Y: Umhm) But I don't seem to recall that too too much.

Y: So the farm house, you spend your childhood, or most of the childhood. (M: Yeah. Well I was told...) Is that still there, or they are going to (--)

M: Oh they're breaking it down. (Y: Right now?) Yeah. They're doing it now. I went, I was going to uh, we went to a polka dance at Lake Winnepesaukee with some, with a relative of my husband's. And I stayed over that night because I didn't want to drive home. It was about twelve o'clock. So I said, gee, the next morning I said, "gee, I think I'll write them." They lived near our street, Currier Street, that's near the Merrimack Valley Country Club. I said, "gee, I'm going to go up and see the old homestead." Oh, when I ever got there! Oh, it was all overgrown! The bushes! You couldn't see. There were no apple trees. They were all bushing. The driveway was covered. You couldn't see the house, and I was wondering whether I was in the right place. And it, they had uh, when my brother sold it, they had a fire there. And I don't know, it seemed to always be in litigation, but they never did anything about it. So just um, last Thursday a friend of mine at the Senior Center told me they're really plowing it, bulldozing, and doing everything there. Eighteen acres of land. I said, "gee Pa", when I saw what I saw I said, "Oh Pa would be turning over in his grave if he saw what they did to our beautiful place!

Y: Isn't this disturbing? I mean [unclear], all your childhood, you know, the trees and uh, um, (--)

M: You know we used to have a beautiful apple tree right on the lawn too. And I used to enjoy Sunday afternoons, like about four o'clock when the sun is going down. And the trees are just, the shadows of the trees, you know, it just, on the lawn, and you're playing stick knife or something, as a kid, you know? But we, we had some nice (--)

Y: Who owned the land then? Your brother? You said your brother owned the farm house, or?

M: Well it was left to my brother Peter.

Y: It was left? What about the other children ?

M: Well I don't know why, but Pete used to do most of the work on the farm, you know? Of course I was suppose to be well off that I married a doctor, you know? So I, I didn't. And there was a little dissension there with my brother and his wife. And there still is a little bit, but it's getting better. I think we're all getting older, you know. So we're getting a little closer.

Y: Well I mean that is I guess, not his fault, but you're, still is, maybe the word fault is not correct, but uh, if your parents left the (--)

M: Well it seemed like you know, everything went to Pete.

Y: Peter is the youngest one? (M: Yeah, he's the youngest) The baby one?

M: Yeah. He's, he must be about, he must be eighty. Well close to eighty, seventy-nine. But he's a, he's a good brother. I like Pete.

Y: Yeah. I wonder why parents do such things, you know? I mean I can understand leaving you out. You married that doctor, so they thought you are uh, but still.

M: Nobody said anything to me. I mean nothing was ever said. Uh, when uh, when a note came in, and I had to relinquish my right, I did without a question. I didn't want any [unclear] .

Y: The other brothers, like John and Charles, they must have felt funny about that.

M: Well I don't know. Well Charlie too. I mean he was a doctor, you know, so he probably, they thought maybe he was, but Pete was doing all right for himself.

Y: And John was at home all the time. I guess it's not important after awhile.



M: Well I guess John, John got a little something, but I don't think that it was equivalent to what he should have got. But he's taken care of now.

Y: Does he have John's Social Security? I mean he can (--)

M: Oh yeah, yeah, he's social security. In fact, John is on welfare. He's on welfare since he, he couldn't work at that time. He, he was really very bad. That's why his shoulder, even now (--)

Y: What happened? And accident or something?

M: Uh, he fell. He fell, and um, wrenched, wrenched his shoulder. And I don't know whether they didn't put it back right, or what, but he was living along, you know. And uh, you don't know about what happens, whether they're drinking, or what. You know. But um, he, he doesn't, he doesn't, he likes a bottle of beer. In fact, my brother Pete always brings him a case of beer about once every month, you know. So he enjoys the stuff, a bottle of beer. But um, our family didn't imbibe in drinking.

Y: The Irish people I heard are into drinking.

M: Yeah, they seem to be. That's why they're always so happy-go-lucky.

Y: Well um, thank you again. And uh, I should uh, (--)

M: Well you're welcomed.

Y: I should go. I got your pictures. I got your sandwich. And uh, all this information.

Tape two ends